

AUCKLAND COUNCIL MEDIA RELEASE

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Shakespeare Open Sanctuary gets go ahead for pest eradication

Independent commissioners have granted the Auckland Council resource consent to carry out animal pest eradication on a defined area of Shakespeare Regional Park, by way of aerial bait application.

“This is a significant milestone in working toward open sanctuary status,” says Ian Maxwell, Manager Parks, Sports and Recreation for the Auckland Council.

“A lot of work has gone into securing funding, building a pest-proof fence and preparing the park for pest eradication. This includes rigorous research into the methods for applying poison bait and managing the park during the eradication period,” he says.

Planning for the open sanctuary and fundraising for the fence began in 2004. Fence construction officially kicked off in early 2010 and completion is scheduled for late February 2011. Community partner, the Shakespeare Open Sanctuary Society Inc (SOSSI) has raised \$475,000 toward the cost of the fence. The open sanctuary will encompass more than 500 hectares of land, including Shakespeare Regional Parkland and the adjoining wastewater treatment plant and New Zealand Defence Force land.

“Integration is a core philosophy of this project,” says Mr Maxwell. “It brings together varying land uses, including farming, recreation, a utility and a military operation; and adds a viable conservation layer.

“The benefits of this mainland island will be seen for generations to come, as treasured species are reintroduced, or return naturally from nearby protected areas, and are allowed to thrive without threat from predators,” he says.

The pest eradication programme, which will be carried out while the affected area of the park is closed, is scheduled for the latter half of this year. Shakespeare Regional Park will be closed to the public from 1 July until mid-December. This coincides with the traditional low-use period for day visitors, camping and site bookings. Okoromai and Army Bays are a buffer zone for the open sanctuary area and remain open throughout this eradication period, except on days when bait is being aurally applied.

The poison bait (brodifacoum) will be spread by controlled aerial application using a helicopter and specially designed bucket. This is international best practice for rodent eradication and has a substantial track record for achieving conservation outcomes. A system called trickle baiting will be used around the coastal margins and the coastline will be swept by ground crews after baits have been laid to remove any bait that falls below the high water mark.

The conditions of the resource consent and the council’s operational plan clearly identify all of the necessary precautions that need to be taken to ensure that the bait application is safe for both the public and the environment.

Public notices, signs and boats patrolling the coast will inform the public in the lead up to and during the operation.

“Council will be providing park users and the public with further information in the coming months,” says Mr Maxwell. “It is important to note that all information from the council will include the Auckland Council logo and a contact number or website for further information,” he says.

The resource consent process was subject to an appeal period that is open to all submitters. No appeals were lodged and the Auckland Council is now refining its operational plan, according to the conditions outlined in the resource consent.

The council has already carried out a similar project at Tawharanui Regional Park near Warkworth. The Tawharanui Open Sanctuary was officially opened in 2006 and kiwi, kakariki, whiteheads, robins and pateke have all been successfully reintroduced.

To find out more about the Shakespear Open Sanctuary project go to www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz or to support the Shakespear Open Sanctuary Society Inc go to www.sossi.org.nz.

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For further information please contact:

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About Shakespear Open Sanctuary

The vision for the open sanctuary is to create an open and accessible wildlife sanctuary that integrates public recreation, conservation and farming and which provides a source and a linkage for native bird species to repopulate the Whangaparaoa peninsula.

The open sanctuary will encompass more than 500 hectares of land at the eastern end of the Whangaparaoa peninsula including Shakespear Regional Park (Auckland Council), The Tamaki Leadership Centre (New Zealand Defence Force) and the Army Bay Wastewater Treatment Plant (Watercare). Although part of the open sanctuary, the New Zealand Defence Force and the wastewater treatment plant land remains off limits to the public at all times.

A 1.7km pest proof fence has been built across the Whangaparaoa Peninsula, from Okoromai Bay to Army Bay. This fence has automatic public access gates (scheduled for installation and completion in March 2011). An intensive animal pest eradication and control programme is planned for winter of 2011, when the park is closed to the public and the farm’s livestock have been removed. Targeted pest species include mice, ship rats, Norway rats, weasels, stoats, ferrets, cats, possums, rabbits and hedgehogs.

The project will use the proven method of aerial application of the cereal bait over the 500 hectare plus area.

The open sanctuary is significant because it extends Tiritiri Matangi Island to the mainland. The importance of this relationship is reflected in the continuous movement of native species such as tui, bellbirds and kakariki between Tiritiri Matangi and Shakespear Regional Park. Resident endangered species such as moko skink will thrive in the pest free environment.

Integral to the success of this project are the partnerships that the Auckland Council has formed with volunteer group the Shakespear Open Sanctuary Society Incorporated (SOSSI), the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) and Watercare. SOSSI has tirelessly fundraised for its financial contribution toward the pest proof fence and provides ongoing volunteer support on the park. Neighbouring landowners NZDF and Watercare are very supportive of the project.